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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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THE A B C OF CANNED FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GRADE LABELING

Food-buying habits depend to a considerable extent on the money people have and are willing to spend. Those with larger incomes are willing to pay high prices in their effort to obtain canned foods of the best quality. Others, with limited incomes, often select lower qualities if thereby they can reduce their expenditures for food. Most people, regardless of their annual income, usually make an effort to get their money's worth.

To purchase intelligently, the housewife needs some means of identifying quality in food products. If the label carries no definite information as to the quality of the contents, the homemaker must purchase by guess. The tremendous growth of the canning industry from the time canners took over from our grandmothers the job of preserving a large part of our food supply has given rise to thousands of brand names. Because of the number alone, it is impossible for either retailers or consumers to associate the correct quality with each brand. Even if this were possible, the quality of many brands is not always uniform. These difficulties have led to a demand for some reliable means of identifying the quality of canned foods.

Four Quality Classes

The four quality classes for canned fruits and vegetables established by the U. S. Department of Agriculture provide this identification. Regardless of the brand name, the price asked, or the store in which it is found, every can of fruit or vegetable on the market can be classified as Grade A, B, C, or D. The grade of the product when sold in large units to the jobber or chain store, however, is frequently specified by the synonymous trade terms, Fancy, Choice, Standard, and Substandard.

Regardless of the grade designation, canned foods in any one of these grades are nutritious and wholly acceptable for human consumption. Otherwise, they could not be marketed in interstate commerce; the products would be illegal and subject to seizure under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

Grade A (Fancy)

In this grade are only the finest canned fruits and vegetables, carefully selected as to size, color, degree of maturity, and freedom from blemishes. The fruits are meaty, highly colored, and ripe. They are almost always packed in sirup, which may be extra-heavy (very sweet), heavy (somewhat sweet), medium (sweet), or light (slightly sweet), although for certain purposes, the fruit may be packed in water. Grade A canned vegetables are the most tender and succulent forms produced and processed.

Grade B (Choice)

The products in Grade B are of excellent quality, though not quite so well selected as to color, size, and maturity as Grade A products. Grade B canned fruits are well-developed and well-colored, and are packed in sirup or water as specified for Grade A. Grade B canned vegetables are not quite so succulent and tender as those of Grade A.

Grade C (Standard)

Products in Grade C are of good quality but are not so uniform in color, size, and maturity as Grade B products. Grade C canned fruit may not be so highly colored, or so carefully selected as to size and symmetry, and though mature may vary somewhat in ripeness. The fruit may be packed in sirup or water. Grade C vegetables in some cases may have more food value than either Grade A or B as they usually are more fully mature than the products in the higher grades.

Grade D (Below U. S. Standard)

Canned fruits and vegetables below Grade C in quality and usually below the standard quality promulgated under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act are designated Grade D. The products are wholesome but the quality is below that of Grade C.

Grades for 36 Commodities

Grades have been developed by the Department of Agriculture for the following canned commodities:

Apples	Corn, cream-style	Pimientos
Apple Sauce	Corn, whole-grain	Plums
Apricots	Fruit for cocktail	Potatoes, sweet
Asparagus	Grapefruit	Pumpkin
Beans, Dry	Grapefruit, juice	Raspberries
Beans, Lima	Mushrooms	Sauerkraut
Beans, Snap	Okra	Spinach
Beets	Peaches, freestone	Succotash
Blackberries	Peaches, yellow	Tomatoes
Carrots	clingstone	Tomato catchup
Cherries,	Pears	Tomato juice
red sour pitted	Peas	Tomato pulp
Cherries, sweet	Peas, black-eye	

Grading of Canned Products

The canner may grade his own fruit and vegetable products. If he desires he may use the grades developed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture or he may employ grades that he has set up for his own use. If he uses the terms A, B, C, or D on the labels in designating the grade of any of his products, however, such labeled products must meet the requirements for the specified grade as defined by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Or, he may employ trained inspectors of the Department of Agriculture to inspect and certify the grade of his products for him by paying the fees required to cover the cost of the service.

Continuous Factory Inspection

Inspectors of the Agricultural Marketing Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture are located in a few carefully selected canning factories under the "continuous inspection" plan, requested by the canners who pay the cost of the service. Government inspectors are on duty all the time the plants are in operation, observing each step in the preparation of the product. Inspectors are furnished only to plants which are cooperating with the Department in the grade labeling of their products. Such plants meet certain strict requirements relating to housekeeping and sanitation.

Grade Labeling

Canners may label their products with the terms "Grade A," "Grade B," "Grade C," or "Fancy," "Extra Standard," or "Choice," and "Standard" provided their merchandise meets the requirements of the grade claimed. Otherwise, they are liable to the penalties for mislabeling provided under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

Only canned products packed in plants under the "continuous inspection" of the Agricultural Marketing Service may carry the prefix "U. S." in connection with the grade designation. In order to leave no loophole that might destroy the integrity of the U. S. grade label, an outline of the shield of the Agricultural Marketing Service is embossed on the cover of all cans that are packed in factories under continuous inspection and that bear the grade legend. The shield of the Agricultural Marketing Service is blown in the bottom of glass containers packed in these plants.

Consumers can buy grade-labeled canned goods--with or without the "U. S." prefix--in many retail stores throughout the country. If the prefix is used, it means that the product has been prepared in a plant operating under continuous inspection of the Agricultural Marketing Service. If the prefix is not shown, the grade statement means that the packer or distributor claims that the product meets the requirements of the grade shown.

B. E. S.
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Grades for Other Products

Grades for frozen and dried fruits and vegetables also are being prepared by the Agricultural Marketing Service. Grades for frozen peas and frozen Lima beans are already in use on a tentative basis. In these grades the designations Grade A, Grade B, and Grade C, are also used in order to simplify selection for consumers. It is expected that the grades for additional commodities will bear similar designations.

Other products that can be purchased at retail and that bear a statement of the grade based on the Federal standards include beef, lamb, veal, dressed poultry, eggs, cheese, butter, rice, and honey. Some fruits and vegetables and dry beans are occasionally sold in grade-identified "consumer packages."
